The effectiveness of using toys in developing Palestinian students’ communication skills and vocabulary retention

Dr. Ibrahim Mahmud Sabatin
Hebron University -Hebron, Palestine

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using toys in developing Palestinians students communication skills. It also examined the long-term effect of the toys on the retention of the vocabulary. The researcher chose 60 third grade students from Quiziba School for girls and boys in Hebron area. He chose two classes from the third grade classes randomly. The sample of the study was 60 students, 30 students in each one. Toys were used in teaching the experimental group, while the traditional way was used with the control one in the first semester of the academic year (2013-2014).

The experiment lasted for six weeks. After two weeks, a delayed test was administrated to the experimental group to measure retention. The results of the study revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the total mean score in communication skills achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group) in the post test. It also showed that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean score in vocabulary achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group). And this was due to the method of using toys in teaching vocabulary. In the light of those findings the study recommended the necessity of using toys in teaching English language to make better outcomes in students' achievement and to shed light on techniques that emphasize organizing information for long learning (retention).

Introduction
Language plays an essential role in making people communicate with each other. And as for English, it is considered one of the most important languages all over the world. It helps communicating with foreigners at home and abroad. Accordingly, The English language is widely used in science, technology, computer services, politics, commerce and internet. Hence, many countries emphasize the importance of teaching English to their citizens. Richards (2001: 1) believes that “Second and foreign language teaching is one of the world’s largest educational enterprises and millions of children and adults worldwide devote large amounts of time and efforts to the task of mastering a new language”. The English language has a special place in the world today. It has become an international language, both in the sense that it is now the native language of people from several continent sand in the sense that many others have learnt to speak it as a second language (Graddol, Cheshire& Swann,1987:3). Ardeo (2003:110) states that during the last few decades there has been an increasing need to use the English language for the expression of knowledge within specific professional fields. In order to achieve a successful process of learning English, one must acquire its vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and the Four skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Accurate and adequate vocabulary influences language comprehension more than grammatical correctness in effective communication. In this concern, Wilkins (1972:111) emphasizes that “Without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”. This clarifies the importance and the essential role of vocabulary in learning a foreign language. Vocabulary is a vital part of language that students need to master in order to communicate effectively. Moreover, it is considered the base for the other skills.

Statement of the Problem
The researchers has observed that students face big difficulties in English communication skills and vocabulary retention. This difficulty might be a result of ineffective communication skills and vocabulary teaching methods which affect their vocabulary achievement and retention. Thus, the students' low achievement level in communication skills and vocabulary requires a serious research for alternative and effective techniques that may increase students' achievement and motivation, and adults worldwide devote large amounts of time and efforts to the task of mastering a new language”. The English language has a special place in the world today. It has become an international language, both in the sense that it is now the native language of people from several continents and in the sense that many others have learnt to speak it as a second language.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the present study is to investigate the effectiveness of using toys on the learners' achievement in communication skills and vocabulary retention.

In short we can say that this study will try to help teachers of English in Palestine to improve their students’ level in communication skills and to achieve good communication in foreign language.

Research Questions:
· Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean score in communication skills achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group ) in the post test.
· Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the mean score in communication skills achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group ) due to sex.
· Are there statistically significant differences at ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the total mean score in vocabulary achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group )

Limits of the Study
The researcher acknowledges the following limitations to the study. This study will be limited to the third grade students who study English at Hebron area for the academic year 2013/2014. The results of this study could not be generalized out the boarders of these limits. All of the subjects are non-native speakers of English. The results of this study could be generalized only to other similar conditions.

Methodology
This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of using toys in developing the third grade students
communication skills achievement. It also examined the long-term effect of toys on the retention of the vocabulary.

**Research Design**

The researchers followed the experimental approach. Two groups were assigned as the participants of the study; the experimental group, and the control group. The research includes four variables; the first variable is toys, the second variable is vocabulary achievement, the third variable is communication skills, the fourth variable is vocabulary retention. The experimental group was taught communication skills and vocabulary via toys, while the control group was taught via the traditional method. The experiment lasted for six weeks. Both groups were taught by the same teacher, the researchers.

**Population of the Study**

The population of the study consists of all third grade students at the governmental schools in Hebron area in the first semester of the academic year (2013-2014).

**Sample of the Study**

The sample of the study consisted of (60) students distributed into two groups; one experimental group consists of (30) students and one control group consists of (30) students. The sample of the study was chosen purposively from Quaziba girls school. The sample of the study was randomly chosen from the third grade classes and equally divided into two groups, experimental and control.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher used an achievement tests to gather data. The tests were held on two days. In the first day, the researcher divided the subjects into two groups (experimental and control). Each group consists of 30 male and female students. The post test was given to them.

**The homogeneity of the sample**

This section of the study presents the homogeneity between the two experimental and the two controlled groups in order to form homogenous groups. Before administering the test, the research assured the homogeneity of all students to form homogeneous groups, depending on their GAE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Dev</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>T-VALUE</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>74.4286</td>
<td>1.77484</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>-.762</td>
<td>0.449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>76.3714</td>
<td>1.83023</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A: Controlled group  
B: Experimental group

As can be seen from the mean scores in Table (3.5) group A assigned (M=74.43, Sd=1.77) while group B assigned (M=76.37, Sd=1.83). Both groups assigned almost the same mean scores. No significant difference was found between the two groups.(P > 0.05)

**Results :Data Analysis**

This section will discuss the results of the effectiveness of using toys on the learners' achievement in communication skills and vocabulary retention.

The study revealed the following results:

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no statistically significant difference in the total mean score in communication skills achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group) in the post test
Comparing the mean scores of both texts we notice that the experimental group which was taught by using toys assigned higher mean scores (M=0.717, Sd=0.116) than the controlled group which was taught by the traditional way (M=0.538, Sd=0.156). We notice from Table (1) that the hypothesis is rejected.

**Hypothesis 2**

There is no statistically significant difference in the total mean score in communication skills achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group) due to sex.

**Hypothesis 3**

There is no statistically significant differences at (α ≤ 0.05) in the total mean score in vocabulary achievement between the pupils who learned through toys (experimental group) and those who learned through the traditional method (control group).

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings, derived from the results of this study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Toys stimulate students towards an independent practice of English language instead of direct instruction.

2. Educational toys provide a context in which language is used in a meaningful way and they helped students develop communicative competence in the English language. This also adds an interesting aspect to toys, the competition. Adding competition to educational toys is a good technique to try to push its players to learn.

3. Toys provide students with enjoyment, pleasure, enthusiasm and variation which are significant enough to affect the students' achievement positively.
4. Toys can afford a valuable technique in language classroom for students at intermediate level and hence can be used to facilitate the process of vocabulary learning.

**Pedagogical Implications**

In the light of the study results, the researchers suggest the following:

1. Teachers should be aware of the needs of their students as well as their abilities and can accordingly choose suitable techniques for activating English vocabulary.
2. Teachers should avoid teacher-centered classes and encourage student-centered classes. And should use strategies which can promote learners’ motivation.

**Recommendations**

In the light of the results, the researchers recommend that:

- Curriculum designers and decision makers are recommended to enrich the Palestinian curriculum with different educational toys that tackle the different skills of English language. And Develop and enrich the Teacher's Guide with activities and techniques with different types of toys. Supervisors are recommended to Provide teachers with instructional materials which improve their awareness about toys and their importance and the necessity of using them in teaching English. And Conduct workshops that aim at familiarizing teachers with different toys. English language teachers are recommended to Change the methods and approaches of teaching from traditional to communicative which based on the students' real involvement in the teaching-learning process. And Change their role from instructors who dominate the class into educators whose role is to facilitate, guide, organize, help, coordinate and support the students to communicate and acquire the language.

**Recommendations for Further Studies**

The researchers suggested the following recommendations for further studies:

1. The effect of computerized competitions on developing students reading comprehension skills.
2. The effectiveness of using toys on developing listening comprehension skills.
3. The effect of educational toys on developing students’ critical thinking.
4. The effectiveness of a suggested program based on toys on developing reading comprehension skills.

**References**